

Pugin Society

e-newsletter

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Rosemary Hill *Time's Witness:* *History in the Age of Romanticism*

Allen Lane

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The Pugin Society is delighted that author Rosemary Hill, also our much esteemed committee member, has produced this new work. Rosemary writes in her preface to this splendid book 'What follows here, I suggest, demonstrates that the history we have, at any given moment, is the history we want. It is the picture we choose to see in the clouds'. And in the Age of Romanticism this can surely only be a highly coloured picture, of a very particular sensibility. The striking jacket cover, from *Voyages pittoresques et romantiques dans l'ancienne France*, by Charles Nodier and Isidore Taylor, illustrates this sensibility perfectly. She goes on to explain that the pursuits of the antiquarians of whom she writes, and their approach to the past, preceded the study of history as it was later known, when by the end of the nineteenth century it became more 'professional', more academic, more objective, and an accepted university discipline. Whereas later history dealt more with politics and major public issues, history as seen by the antiquarians tended to focus on actual objects and places and their associations, interpreting the past just as compellingly – if not sometimes more so - but differently.

In this account antiquarians appear in wide variety of guises - conservationists, historians, novelists, artists and architects, sometimes impoverished, eccentric, but all united in their passionate engagement with the past. They emerge here on what is a broad and lively canvas, starting with the fall of the Bastille in 1789 through to the, by then, much changed world of the Great Exhibition of 1851.

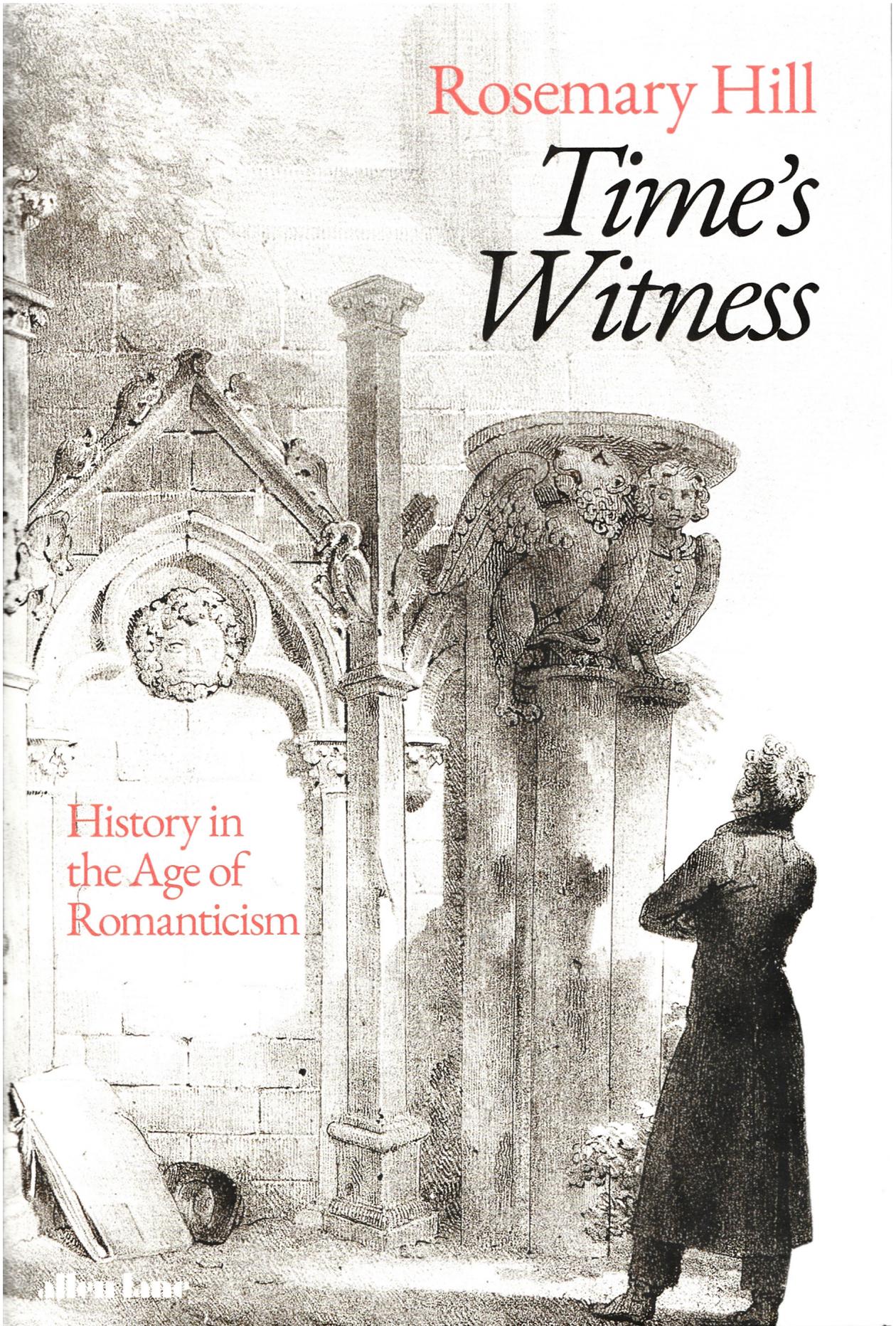
It is good to see Scotland featuring prominently. The figure of Sir Walter Scott, the Wizard of the North, who transformed attitudes to Scotland and to the past, towers over all. Scott was not only an historical novelist and historian but also an antiquarian and collector, as can be seen in his remarkable house at Abbotsford, as personal to him as the Grange was later to be to Pugin at Ramsgate. Robert Burns is also cited, as is the Eglinton Tournament, in Ayrshire, of 1839. Perhaps most bizarre of all in the Scottish context are the brothers John and Charles Allen, who called themselves Sobieski Stuart, and implied that they were grandsons of Bonnie Prince Charlie. Their lasting contribution to social history was their effect on the manufacture of clan tartans, based on what appears to have been a forged document, the *Vestiarium Scoticum*. It is fascinating to see, amongst the well selected illustrations, a photograph by the great Scottish photographers Hill and Adamson of one of the brothers, a striking if misguided figure, romantically accoutred in Highland dress.

This is the Pugin Society e-Newsletter, and we should remind ourselves that both Augustus Pugin and his father were compulsive antiquarians and collectors and indeed essential, nay central to, the progress of antiquarianism, particularly in their love and knowledge of, and search for, all things Gothic. Both appear in *Time's Witness*, along with other antiquarians whose names are familiar within the Pugin canon, such as Eustache Hyacinthe Langlois and Arcisse de Caumont in France – Normandy being a centre for antiquarian activity - and in England, the Catholic Edward Willson (and indeed many antiquaries were Catholic), John Britton, publisher, and the stained glass maker and heraldic painter Thomas Willement.

Rosemary Hill

*Time's
Witness*

History in
the Age of
Romanticism



Later on, Augustus Pugin's triumph with his Mediaeval Court in the Great Exhibition 1851, referred to in *Time's Witness*, perhaps shows how times, and Pugin, had changed since the days of Scott's *Waverley* and Pugin's own wild enthusiasm for the Sobieski Stuarts. The Mediaeval Court presented beautifully and solidly made Gothic-influenced objects for the wider public. By 1851 impulsive romanticism had given way to a more considered, even commercial, approach to the past.

Antiquarian activity in France during the period covered in *Time's Witness*, was triggered in particular by the fearful desecration of monuments, and even of the royal tombs of the monarchs of France, that occurred during the French Revolution and which continued thereafter also, up into the 1830s. Many antiquarians and lovers of the past wanted to preserve what was left and draw public attention to the plight of historic buildings and artefacts, not least Victor Hugo, whose great novel *Notre -Dame de Paris*, Rosemary describes as portraying 'the dying world of the middle ages'. The wreckage from the past was salvaged by such people as the antiquarian Alexandre de Sommerard, whose extensive collection in Paris eventually became the basis of the Musée de Cluny.

There is so much more that could be said about this book and its content, which is dense and richly informative, but always absorbing, and I have only been able to just touch on a few themes here. There are many more. Buy the book and enjoy it. As I read, I found myself wondering if in today's world there are still people like these antiquaries to be found – lovers of the past so committed, sometimes quirky, sometimes impoverished, but always active in their cause and independently thinking with it. Perhaps some local historians and even members of societies such as ours might answer somewhat to this description? Or have more streamlined and professional approaches to history today rendered the, in a way, more ingenuous world of the antiquaries impossible to re-create?

The ending of *Time's Witness* is as follows. Rosemary writes: 'By the time George Eliot published *Middlemarch* in 1872 the image of the antiquary had been transformed. Bonington's abstracted alchemist, Scott's engaging curmudgeon and Hazlitt's noble dreaming Quixote, had all vanished, and in their place was only the unlovely figure of Edward Casaubon'. What a deathblow to Romance indeed, and how telling.

Time's Witness is dedicated to the memory of the distinguished architectural historian, Gavin Stamp, Rosemary's late husband.

Catriona Blaker

**Don't be shy.
Send your contributions for the e-newsletter to
jpelliott@btinternet.com**

Charles Scarisbrick graveyard cross

Nick Beveridge

In Issue 13 of the e-newsletter I wrote about the redevelopment and sale of the former Stapehill Abbey in Dorset. Pugin's windows in the church were discussed and his cemetery cross to Mother Augustin de Chabannes was mentioned in passing. Since then I have been reminded of an article, Part 5 of 'Charles Hansom, a Pugin Follower', (Pugin Foundation Newsletter Number 87), which did mention the windows in the church as well as the cemetery memorial cross [image 1]. Worth noting is Brian Andrews' remark that the cross proper matched that (which was earlier) beside St Austin of England's Church at Kenilworth, both designed by Pugin.



Image 1

Image 2



Pugin churchyard crosses had already been the subject of a series of articles by Brian in the same publication, with the second on page 4 of Number 2 dealing with that at Kenilworth. The description accompanying an image of the cross includes “The cross proper is of octagonal section with simple cusping and stands on a tapered octagonal shaft.”

The above description, with the addition of some surface decoration, could also be applied to the cross atop the tomb of Charles Scarisbrick at the centre of the graveyard of St Elizabeth’s Church at Scarisbrick in Lancashire [image 2]. According to an online guide to the church, St Elizabeth’s was designed by Pugin’s youngest son Peter Paul in 1888 and replaced the former St Mary’s Chapel which had a burial ground.

Charles had inherited Scarisbrick Hall from his brother in 1835 and employed Pugin to remodel it in 1837-1845. He died in 1860 and was buried in the graveyard (then of St Mary’s) in accordance with some curious instructions. After his death Scarisbrick Hall was inherited by his sister Anne who employed Edward Welby Pugin from 1861 to complete the lavish renovation.

I haven’t been able to find any information about exactly when the cross was erected or by whom it was designed or made. Perhaps Edward Pugin was responsible for it or, if around the time of the church, Peter Paul, who is known for reusing his father’s designs and could have done so here with those for Kenilworth and Stapehill?

Notes

1 <https://www.stelizabeths-scarisbrick.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Historical-Guide-Feb2021.pdf>
